



1st Prize Winning Letter
by
Claudia Maria

For my Mom

You often tell me that I owe you nothing; that I am the woman I am today because it is simply who God has made me. You tell me what a special girl I am and how proud you are of me. I tell you it's because of you, and you shake your head and say it's not true. But it is.

I am brave today, because you are the original courageous one. You left everything you knew and everyone you love to come to America. Here, you were swallowed into the ugly depths of domestic violence and when you had me, it became a struggle you fiercely protected me from. I will never forget the times you'd risk your life to save mine. Without hesitation, time and time again, you'd stand between me and the blows. When all the money would go to feed his addictions, you found a way. Sometimes our daily bread came from food banks. Other times, we'd take the loose change you'd collect and buy as much as we could with our budget. I can't remember going to bed hungry. But I remember the times you'd sacrifice your portion of the little we had, so I wouldn't know the feeling of hunger. I will never forget the day you became for me the most courageous woman in the world. You made the call that took him away for good. But it was a different fear for you to pick up that phone. There was a language barrier. As an immigrant woman, you lived in a reality where we could be split up. If he was taken away, we would be left with nothing: no one to turn to; no where to go. But none of that mattered for you.



I dream today, because you are the original dreamer. Despite all of these fears, you had a dream for us. It would've been easier to return to Mexico for you, where all our family lives and we had support. But that was not what you envisioned for my life. You overlooked the tremendous struggle you would go through as an undocumented single mom, for the benefits of prosperity and opportunity I would have here as an American. We literally had nothing but the clothes on our back. But we had everything in each other. You took me to the safety of a battered women's shelter. For months we slept tightly in a twin size bed and it was the first time I realized how blessed I was to have you as mi Mama (my Mom). You were different from the other Moms. Despite all we'd gone through, you never stopped dreaming for us. And it was your enthusiasm, positivity and relentless faith that saved me from what could have been such a traumatic experience in my life.

I am hardworking and persevering today, because you are the original fighter. In less than a year we went from nothing to our own place. You worked so hard. On weekdays we'd only spend the first hours of the morning and the last hours of the night together. But they were always the best parts of my day. You eventually got us a car, you pushed to dramatically improve your English, and went from working as a secretary at an affordable housing complex, to the manager of several apartments. You would collect cans to make extra change on the weekends. You went from wrapping toiletries and food as presents during Christmas, to wrapping my favorite disney movies and toys. I saw how dedicated you were to everything you did. And I see it now when you work long hours cleaning houses. I grew up hearing you say, "No matter what you do, be the best at it M'ija. Produce work you can have pride in," and it's the kind of work ethic that has guided me all my life.

I chose love today, because you have always loved fearlessly. One of the greatest acts of love, is to bless others when you're going through hardship yourself. That's who you are Mami (mama). No matter what the circumstance has been, you have always served the community. You don't ever hesitate to give a helping hand. I grew up hearing you say "We need to give of what we have, not what we have left over" and though in my selfishness, I'd sometimes get mad at your insistence on this philosophy, your commitment to bettering people's lives is the reason I view my education as a tool of empowerment for our community. I grew up seeing you feed the homeless; people you'd make friends with and treated with human dignity in ways many don't. I grew up hearing you empower other survivors of domestic violence. I saw the ways you would advocate for immigrants, constantly inspiring love of self and love of others. When I was diagnosed with psoriasis, the world showed me hate. But you constantly reminded me to show love. "You may have spots on your skin m'ija, but you have the clearest heart. And that is real beauty" I love and value myself today because you taught me how to do this.

You are the reason I am everything I am. You live in a way that honors our family, our community, God, and yourself. I am a product of your commitment to being the greatest mom in the world. Natalia and I are the luckiest Mujercitas (Ladies) to have you in our lives. In a world seeming to be full of negatives you inspire many to see the beauty in places where only darkness appears to be. I can never repay you for the support, love, and friendship you've shown me Mamita (Mommy). Being your daughter has been the greatest joy of my life. I pray I can only make you as proud as you have made me. Gracias.

Letter to My Parents Contest in Hawai'i 2014

Organized by

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2nd Prize Winning Letter
by
Norman Macadangdang

October 20, 2014

Dear Papa Ruben and Mama Alma,



While growing up, I heard morbid stories like mama died while giving birth to me, both of you separated because of third parties on both sides, or planned an abortion that would have killed me 22 years ago. Each relative has a different version of the story – papa’s side blames mama’s immaturity while mama’s family blames papa’s drinking problems. The stories are confusing, but all of the ambiguous tragic events brought by your separation caused my life’s greatest lessons.

It is ironic writing both of you a letter in appreciation of what you have done to my life. I do not know if there was something to be appreciated. I grew up under relative’s care because in third grade I learned that mama was living in Dubai with a fiancée while papa was busy dating like a teenager. I thought she was dead. I was dumbfounded.

For some months, I would live with you papa. Those months covered the air with the disgusting aroma of beer, gin, and cigarette smoke. If smelling could make me tipsy, I would have started drinking illegally. Then you’ll be nowhere to be found. I’ll be with aunties and uncles whom I’ve called mamas or papas in your absence. During the melting heat of summers, mommy and tata, my paternal grandparents, took charge of me. I would be lucky if mama spared a day in a year to visit. Most of the times, she was within a mile radius visiting friends, but not me. One thing was certainly lucid, both of you were not there. I keep on asking myself, who am I for and who was my own?

Even though you were not there to teach what parents were supposed to impart to their children, implicitly, you taught me priceless lessons I live by every breath that I take.

First, you prepared me not to be shaken when I hear shocking answers which were against my beliefs. I heard things like “you were supposed to be aborted, but they just let you live.” Sometimes people said, “They don’t like you.” In worst cases, I heard, “Maybe you were just adopted.” There were no truths behind all of these. I am still alive, there’s no way abortion took place. People liked me; our relatives took

care of me. I wasn't adopted, I am pre-diabetic and that runs in our families. Because both of you were not there when I heard these words, I learned to keep calm. I learned not to believe in everything that I hear; and if I would hear worst things than me getting aborted, I could easily flash a smile. At least, you know that no matter sharp tongues would attack me, I will still survive.

Then, you taught me how to be strong amidst all trials. On my first day as a junior in high school, I heard that mama died. That time, her death was real. I wanted to flood the world with tears, but I just couldn't. I wanted the world to know how deeply devastated I felt. Yet, no tears fell. Up to this day, if something goes wrong I remain as objective as I could be. I learned to keep my emotions, my problems, my sufferings, and my difficulties to myself. I've believed that the more I can keep, I become stronger. This silence made my voice vibrate to immense loudness. Thanks for making that voice in me stronger.

As I became stronger, you taught me another valuable lesson in my life – never to be comfortable in where I am standing. Both of you made me realized that if I was too comfortable in where I am, I could easily be thrown away in the freezing hotness of life. There were constant changes. I've lost people, possessions, and time, but because I knew when to stop expecting, the scars were not too deep.

Above all the lessons you've taught me in your hiatus as my parents, you've made me appreciate all people – relatives, friends, and strangers. All of them were there for me and became my family. Our relatives took time out of their already chaotic lives to provide for me and take care of my needs. I had friends along the way who listened to my frustrations because nobody was at home to lend a pair of ears. Then there were strangers who in one way or another filled in to be someone to be remembered in life.

If I was another person, I would have wasted my life by now, but missing you was my inspiration. You prepared me to accept all the adversities that I'll be facing in my life. I am stronger, open minded, and more adaptive to change. Your absence in my life was a challenge, but it served as my stepping stone in setting my goals in life.

It only occurred to me, as I am writing this letter, that absence of people in someone's life could actually deliver benefits. If only you can read my letter right now, you would be proud on how I handled your absence. I graduated from college and number one in my class. I am off to a good start. I just hope that I could share my achievements to both of you. If not, I'll talk to kids from broken families and tell them to take advantage of their parents' presence in their lives. Just like an absentee voting ballot, you were not there, but you chose to vote for an indestructible version of me.

Sincerely,

Norman

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3rd Prize Winning Letter
by
Faith Angelica Ulep Pascua

At night in my house when everyone should be sleeping eyes close
minds drifting towards wonderland,
She's still awake in the living room flipping through memories of what
used to be,
She's crying wishing her storied scrapbook past was reality again.
She reminisces over pages of smiles; compiled accomplishments
enough to fill miles of trophy cases.
She was the original dust buster dirt devil housekeeper winner of the
2006 Housekeeper of the Year award.
She remembers wanting to vacuum the red carpet something majestic;
Floors so shiny, you could see your inner child in the reflection. She
idolizes perfection
That hotel was her home away from home, her fortress of solitude and it has been for over 16 years.
She cleans hotel rooms; finds the history in dirty laundry, closet skeletons and linens.
Knows what happens in honeymoon suites, and capable to clean the fuck out of it.
She knows that business trips are filled with more personal endeavors anyway,
Seeing infidelity with the mistake of forgetting the do not disturb sign on the doorknob; she has seen it all.
Until last fall when my brother and I watched her crumble under the fall of the economy,
The uncertainty placed her waiting by the phone.
She's on call for work now. Today she's number 4 but they didn't even make it to 3...
This job is her first baby, 16 years in the making, not having the experience quite yet,



(New to baby bottles and cleaning products) at first this job was just to pay the bills, just for now, just until...

It became her passion, found sanctuary in her pink flowered uniform, and comfort gelled shoes

She's my mother, sobbing solo under the single light in the living room,

Resisting to open her scrapbook, trying to not to find a reason to be angry at the super natural because she's losing faith. Like a flickering candle...

When she thinks no one is around she still tries her uniform on, this is her battle suit;

Her idle hands turn to iron and from wonder woman to wondering woman she feels like she lost her super powers.

My mother is an aglet, found at the tip of shoelaces, she's capable of keeping your sole in place,

She will tell you she loves you by just being there... but she's forgotten.

Her paycheck is the only way she remembers her value, that coming home without one renders her useless.

Mommy, you are not an ATM, not an automated teller machine,

Worth is not measure in money; your amount balance will never be zero to me.

See no one remembers what an aglet is... No one cares about the life of the housekeeper who cleaned their hotel room. But mom, you are more than a source of income

You're my monster in the closet inspector, and the detector of sorrow and sobbing anywhere

Just know when the shake of the money problem earthquake leaves our home, I want you to know

I love you more than a laid off full-time housekeeper, but my full time mother.

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